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SNAPSHOT

Village Elders Uphold Widow's Rights

Women have the right to ask for their share of their father's property, say male and female community leaders



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Women community leaders in Acheen district, Nangarhar province, attend a USAID workshop on inheritance law

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For Khanzima, the nightmare began as soon as she was widowed. She found out that her in-laws were planning to sell her, a common practice among some Afghan tribes. She fled to her blood family in Nangarhar province in the east of Afghanistan, but her brothers refused to let Khanzima and her children stay because of an old land dispute with her late husband's tribe. With nowhere to go and no one to ask for help, a desperate Khanzima turned to Sardara, a spinsary or senior woman community leader in her village.

Sardara had trained in traditional dispute resolution with USAID's Rule of Law Stabilization Program – Informal Component, which seeks to empower women. When Sardara heard that Khanzima's brothers were unwilling to offer protection and the widow had no mahram, the sharia term for a male relative who serves as guardian, she decided there were only two courses of action. She sought help from her husband, Mamor Ahmad, head of the village in Acheen district. As a respected tribal elder, Mr Ahmad convened a Jirga or assembly to discuss Khanzima's plight.

Meanwhile, Sardara summarized Khanzima's situation for her spinsary group, which was well aware of the legal rights afforded to women by Islam. The group decided Khanzima should seek her share of her father's property even as the Jirga came to the same conclusion. The assembly persuaded her unwilling brothers to legally transfer a share of the land to the widow. The Jirga and the spinsary group led Kahi village in contributing to a fund that helped build Khanzima's house, with enough left over to buy a calf.

For Khanzima, the nightmare had finally ended, thanks to crucial training that helped her community support her and uphold her rights.